

## ***FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET***

**Meeting Date:** August 31, 2011

**Agenda Item:** Haymaker WMA Right-of-Way Easement Purchase

**Division:** Wildlife

**Action Needed:** Final

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 5 minutes

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### **Background**

FWP proposes to purchase an easement on ½ mile of road that leads to the Haymaker Wildlife Management Area (HWMA) and associated U.S. Forest Service lands (USFS). HWMA is located in Deer/Elk Hunting District 540 (HD 540) near Harlowton. The USFS lands are part of the Lewis and Clark National Forest. The proposed easement will provide legal public access to the HWMA and adjacent USFS lands in the Little Belt Mountains of central Montana.

Elk populations wintering in HD 540 on the south side of the Little Belts have increased from an average of around 600 elk in the late 1990s to 1,397 elk in the winter of 2009. This large increase in elk has also caused an increase in elk use on the HWMA and has increased the importance of this area to elk hunters. About 4,026 elk and 3,072 deer hunter-days are generated annually on public lands in HD 540.

Currently there is a good-will access allowed by the Olson Brothers to the HWMA and USFS. The landowners currently participate in FWP's Block Management Program and believe the public should have the right to access their lands and wildlife. The landowners recently indicated a willingness to consider selling a permanent public easement on the ½ mile of road that leads from the county road to the existing easement for \$50,000. The closest legal public accesses on the south side of the Little Belts are located eight and seven miles to the east and west, respectively of the proposed easement. The access to the east does allow for travel within the USFS boundary to the HWMA along very rough two-track roads. The access to the west of the proposed project does not allow for travel to the HWMA.

### **Public Involvement Process & Results**

The project EA with public comment will be completed by the August 11<sup>th</sup> Commission meeting. Cattle guards, while not part of the value identified in the purchase agreement, are part of the project proposal, and have been donated by the Billings Rod and Gun Club and the U.S. Forest Service.

### **Alternatives and Analysis**

The lone alternative is to continue using the good-will access, which is at risk of closure especially if the property were sold.

### **Agency Recommendation & Rationale**

The Olsen Brothers have accepted the terms offered by the Department. FWP's recommendation is to approve the purchase of this easement from the Olson Brothers.

### **Proposed Motion**

I move the Commission approve the purchase of a right-of-way easement to the Haymaker Wildlife Management Area.